

MacArthur Area Nominated As National Historic District

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The MacArthur Park neighborhood, which already is being considered for historical district designation by the Little Rock Historical District Commission, has been nominated to be a national historic district.

The state Natural and Cultural Heritage Department has recommended the area to the National Register of Historic Places. Miss Anne Bartley, director of that Department, told the city Commission at a meeting Tuesday that the nomination was "pending" and "there's no problem with it."

Miss Bartley said designation by the National Register would require any federally funded project in the area to be reviewed by her Department to determine its impact on the character of the neighborhood. Any adverse effects would have to be minimized, she said.

An example of this would be the Cumberland Towers at Ninth and Cumberland Streets, a low-rent high rise for the elderly, which was built two years ago by the Little Rock Housing Authority. Miss Bartley said the building was an "incompatible intrusion."

If a historical district is established by the city, the Commission can restrict the architectural design of new buildings in the area. It also could encourage preservation of existing buildings.

'Makes Them Think'

Designation by the National Register would place no restrictions on private developers, but Miss Bartley said, "We hope the fact it is in the Register makes them think about how they use it."

The city Commission has not drawn its boundaries for a district, but the 60-acre area the state recommended to the National Register is bounded generally by Interstate 30 on the east, Capitol Avenue on the north, Sixteenth Street on the south and the alley between Scott and Main Streets on the west.

There are five National Register historic districts in Arkansas, Miss Bartley said. None is at Little Rock. Miss Bartley said her staff also has recommended designation of another district that would encompass a number of government buildings in downtown Little Rock, including Arkansas's First State Capitol where her Department has its offices.

300 Structures

Miss Bartley said her staff would help the city Commission and would provide it with all the information it had collected on the MacArthur Park neighborhood. She said there are about 300 structures within the area recommended to the National Register, and more than 40 of them are historically or architecturally significant. They date from 1840 to the late 19th Century.

She said 135 other structures enhance the residential character of the neighborhood. There are 125 "intrusions" and only 11 of those are "obtrusive," she said.

Ron Jonash, an associate in the Booz, Allen and Hamilton consulting firm of San Francisco, was at the meeting Tuesday. His firm is helping the city Board of Directors develop a growth policy for Little Rock and is working with

the state to develop guidelines for the zoning districts surrounding the state Capitol and the Governor's Mansion.

He said it might be wise to eliminate the reference "intrusions" since they are there and no one is going to recommend they be torn down. The city Commission must get a majority of the property owners in the area to agree to the historical district and it might upset some property owners to be told their structures were intruding, Jonash said.

Maintain Character

Miss Bartley said the object of the historical district was to maintain the character of a neighborhood. The MacArthur Park area is "unique in Arkansas," she said, because it is near downtown and has predominantly residential development, Victorian and Greek revival architecture and substantial tree cover.

Jonash said it might help if the area could be rezoned to emphasize the city's intentions of keeping the turn-of-the-century residential character.

Much of the land is zoned for purposes that it probably will never be used for and many owners are letting existing buildings go into disrepair because "in their fantasies they see an X-story commercial development that is going to return them X-number of dollars. If you can convince them that the area is not going to develop that way, they might start seeing the economics of refurbishing their building."

He said the Commission should enlist the aid of real estate developers because "everybody believes the only thing a realtor is in favor of is money and if realtors are in favor of the district, there must be a pot of gold somewhere."

A proposal to create a historical district in the MacArthur Park area in the early 1960s was defeated because property owners feared it would limit their use of their property and cost them money. The Commission has been discussing whether or not a historic district actually enhances property values.

Values Going Up

Jonash said that while property values usually went up after a historical district was established, studies had shown that in most cases a revitalization of the area was started before the district

was formed and property values were going up anyway.

The Commission agreed that property values in the MacArthur Park area and other downtown residential areas already is going up.

Jonash said the Commission might help sell the historic district to the property owners by offering them a "carrot" they could see immediately. He suggested that the Commission ask for \$20,000 to \$50,000 to dress up the neighborhood from the proposed \$12 to \$15 million bond issue the city is considering.